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BRIEF NOTES ON CERTAIN POINTS IN THE REPORT ON "CHURCH RELATIONS IN ENGLAND"

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I—BACKGROUND

A background to the whole question discussed in this and similar Reports and Schemes.

There are two main forces making for Reunion :

- (a) The Will of God.
- (b) The social instincts of man.

In this era there are many manifestations of this second force in different spheres, social, political, economic and religious : as contrasted with the individualism of the centuries since the sixteenth, this is a collective age. The tendency shows itself under a great variety of forms, e.g. communism, socialism and nationalization, business trusts, the welfare state ; and in the religious sphere in e.g. the liturgical movement with its emphasis on common rather than individual piety. Some of these manifestations are good, some bad ; and while it is right that we

should try to harness this tremendous force to subserve the divine purposes there is a grave danger in doing so lest we mistake (b) for (a). It is all too easy to ascribe to the Holy Spirit what in fact proceeds from the spirit of the age we live in and from the herd-instincts of man. Any movement which draws Christians closer is to be welcomed, but the greatest caution is necessary lest we betray the permanent to the temporary and squander the treasure entrusted to us by God for the sake of human advantage.

2—INTERCOMMUNION

In the Archbishop's Sermon (Report, p. 11) it should be noted that while His Grace states that the Church of England *can* be in communion with the Church of Sweden, no action has been taken by the Convocations in this matter, so that this mere possibility cannot rightly be quoted as a precedent. The same applies to the reference on p. 39 to the Churches of Finland, Latvia and Estonia.

3—A PRELIMINARY TASK

The Report is not (nor presumably would its framers conceive it to be) the only possible reaction to the Archbishop's Sermon. The presuppositions mentioned by His Grace at the foot of page 11 have not all been thoroughly explored in the Report, which for instance can do no more than set out with misleading brevity different views as to what are "the essential principles of the Church". It would have been wiser to have examined this question more fully from a doctrinal standpoint than to proceed to adumbrate a scheme for action as is done in the final stages of the Report.

But in fact it is a legitimate conclusion from this part of the Sermon that there is really a preliminary task necessary for the Church of England before effective discussion with others is possible, viz. to settle the question, "What do we mean by episcopacy?" Until some clearer doctrine of episcopacy has been reached among ourselves, it is of little use to hand it over to another body as a system of government without any doctrinal basis. We must try first to settle what *are* "the essential principles of the Church, the Scriptures, the Creeds, the Sacraments and of the Ministry" before we can hope to reach fruitful agreement with others upon these vital matters.

4—THE CHURCH

The Report justly implies (p. 20) that neither the Church of England as such nor any other of the bodies taking part in the discussion can claim to be "the Church" or even "a Church" in the sense in which these terms are used in the New Testament.

But it does not examine the question whether there is in fact any unit which *can* claim to be "a Church" in this sense. Yet the local diocese, consisting of bishop, presbyters, deacons and laity, does correspond very closely to the New Testament local Church. The Report falsifies the position by an inaccurate definition: "The New Testament idea of the Church as *the fellowship in which all Christians of the place are united in their Christian faith and worship*". It is *not* the inclusiveness of all worshippers but the divine commission which is the essential mark of the New Testament Church as a whole, and consequently of the local Church. Traces are already present in the New Testament of Christians *outside* the Church: their presence in a particular city would not make the Church of that locality any less a Church than it was before.

Although the diocese is not an *autonomous* unit, but acts in a framework with other dioceses, e.g. through provincial synods and convocations, yet it is the *essential* unit of Church life: it is the organized local Church, the legitimate representative to-day of the local Church of the New Testament.

5—THE DENOMINATIONS

The Report wisely draws attention (at the foot of p. 22) to the use of the word "Church" to mean a denomination or communion. It is inevitable that this should be done: charity could hardly do otherwise. Thus we speak of the Baptist Church, etc. Yet this usage disguises a vital difference. The Church of England can claim to be a Church as being a group of dioceses, each articulated in bishop, priests, deacons and laity and corresponding to the local churches of the New Testament. The other participating Churches are not churches in this sense: and to use the word indiscriminately of both obscures the issue. The hope is that they may *become* what we Anglicans can recognize as churches and the Archbishop's Sermon is welcome as suggesting a way in which this can be done. Nevertheless it is begging the question to treat them as being already churches in the sense in which we claim the name for ourselves.

6—SCHISM WITHIN THE CHURCH

"Schism *within* the Church". We may accept this statement (on p. 23), but not in the sense in which it is there applied. There are groups of dioceses which are not in communion with other dioceses: the schism between the Anglo-Saxon and British churches would be a case in point. This notion cannot however be applied to the separation between, e.g., the Church of England and the Methodist Church or the Congregational Union, for these latter are not groups of dioceses. In saying this we need not deny the use made by God of these bodies, nor need we exactly define

what they *are* ; what they are *not* is local churches as we understand the term and as we hope they may become. But until they have become such, the question of intercommunion ought not to be raised.

7—THE FULNESS OF THE LIFE OF THE BODY

The statement on p. 23, section (ii) is inadmissible. It is perfectly *possible*, however lamentable the *actual* failure, for a Church as defined above (i.e. diocese or group of dioceses) "to manifest the fulness of the life of the Body", even though within its geographical area there should be large groups of dissident Christians. Was it impossible for St. Augustine's church at Hippo to manifest the fulness of the life of the Body just because there was a Donatist church in the city?

It may most readily be admitted that the Church in any particular locality may fail to use the opportunities of grace which it receives, while simultaneously another Christian congregation in the same place may manifest those gifts and graces which the Church neglects (e.g. the Whig Bishops and the Wesleyans). But in the first case the possibility of fulness of life remains; in the other there are constitutional effects which rule out the possibility of such fulness, unless it be supplied from *outside*.

8—DOCTRINE

Chapter III (pp. 26-35) of the Report sets out agreements and divergent views about various matters of doctrine. Although there are statements to which exception might be taken, no special comment seems required. The final paragraph is welcome, and it may well be found that the most valuable result of the conversations is the frank exchange of views and facing of differences, in a spirit of charity; and it is to be hoped that this sort of exchange will continue.

9—EPISCOPACY

"Episcopacy cannot be offered to or accepted by the Free Churches as a mere matter of expediency or in a completely undefined form." (Report, p. 38.) This is a statement of the utmost importance: but in spite of the disclaimer, it is by no means clear that it is not precisely this which is in fact being proposed. Episcopacy is not being offered or sought because of anything intrinsic to its nature, but simply as a means to an end. If a Free Church were to desire to accept episcopacy as being a means to fulness of life in the Church, that would be one thing and we should rejoice at it and welcome the fact: and after proper precaution we should be happy to enjoy intercommunion with such a church. There has indeed been something of a movement in this direction within the Free Churches, as is indicated by the Report

(pp. 39, 40) and by Dr. Micklem's broadcast (*Church Times*, November 24th, 1950, p. 866). But at present it seems certain that no Free Church would *welcome* episcopacy, but rather accept it reluctantly as a means of reunion with the Church of England. That is quite another thing, and episcopacy so accepted would be emptied of all vital meaning. Some would go further and say that it would have no validity. It seems therefore that, as for the Church of England so also for the Free Churches, a longer period of discussion and development is necessary before reunion becomes a practical possibility. We should certainly do all in our power by prayer, friendliness and discussion to foster such development.

10—INTERCOMMUNION WITH NON-EPISCOPAL CHURCHES

The insistence by the Free Churches on the retention of intercommunion with non-episcopal churches (Report, p. 38, reiterated on p. 45, section 5), though understandable from their point of view, is likely to prove an insuperable obstacle to Anglicans. For it means that in a Free Church which had accepted episcopacy there would *always* be the possibility of celebrations of the Eucharist by non-ordained ministers from other Communion. For instance, if the Methodists accepted episcopacy and the Congregationalists did not, there would, under the terms of the concordat, always be a welcome to the Congregationalist minister to celebrate in the Methodist church, and such ministration would be treated as equally valid with that of the episcopally ordained Methodist. A visiting Anglican, who believed in the necessity of valid ordination for a valid Eucharist would be in constant confusion of conscience. In effect, the Catholic doctrine of the Church and sacraments would be definitely *excluded*.

It is impossible for a body to become genuinely episcopal without passing some kind of judgment on non-episcopal ministries. It must take its stand with the episcopal churches, and give up trying to have a foot in both camps.

11—"SOME FORM OF FURTHER COMMISSIONING"

"The general plan of any such agreement" (Report, p. 43) appears to cover the whole of the stages of the development of a Free Church into an Episcopal Church in communion with the Church of England. But it is not clear from the Report whether this is intended to be the case or not. Are the numbered proposals an implementation of the long paragraph on page 43 or are they supplementary to it? The former view is taken here, so that no discussion of that paragraph is offered.

Is it possible to conceive "some form of further commissioning" (Report, p. 44. Point 2. Comment) which would be satisfactory to the Church of England other than episcopal ordination? The

same question applies to the use of the phrase "further commissioned to the Presbyterate" in Point 3. This is mere question-begging.

The same evasion is shown over the difficulty discussed on pages 40 and 41. "The Free Churches have repeatedly stated that they are not able to countenance the re-ordination of their Ministers", and would be reluctant to accept a distinction within their ranks (p. 40). This is reasonable enough from the Free Church point of view, and the difficulty might be met if it were understood that reunion was only envisaged as a possibility when the situation within the Free Church had had time to work itself out. But the Report continues (p. 41): "it would seem desirable at an appropriate stage to consider the possibility of reaching a solution to the problem, which would be . . . satisfactory to the Church of England as genuinely conveying the gifts and authority that have traditionally been associated with episcopal ordination". How can this be done except by episcopal ordination?

On most points the Report succeeds in avoiding the evasions and glossing over of difficulties which are too frequent in such discussions. But on this topic it has signally failed to do so.

The admission to communion proposed on p. 45, Point 3, opens the door to complete chaos. Because a Methodist minister fifty miles away has been consecrated bishop, and for no other reason, it would be open to Methodist communicants to present themselves at the altar of the parish church one Sunday and to communicate at the hands of their unordained minister the next. What doctrine of the Church underlies such a proceeding? Certainly the Catholic doctrine of the Church, Ministry and Sacraments is no longer tenable in such conditions.

Point 5 (Report p. 45), as has already been pointed out (section 10 above), means that ministers not episcopally ordained would from time to time be invited to celebrate the eucharist in the chapels of the episcopal Free Church: and their celebration would be treated as equally valid with that of priests. The implication would be that the so-called episcopal Free Church had received episcopacy merely as a method of government and pastoral oversight, and that it denied that it was in any way essential to the validity of sacraments. The name of bishop would have been assumed; but with what reality of meaning? As Dr. Micklem says, "Do let us deal with spiritual realities and not be put off by names". Accepting episcopacy means much more than accepting new titles for superintendent ministers, and so forth; episcopacy involves theories of validity and of divine grace.

"The Church of England would not regard the matter as one which should stand in the way of the achievement of

intercommunion between itself and the Free Church." This statement, although it will be received by some on the grounds that the Church of England is not directly involved, is in reality impossible to accept. Would Anglicans be able to become members of a Free Church under such conditions without violating their consciences? If not, they have no right to enter into communion with such a body. Furthermore, it would in practice be impossible for the Church of England to avoid being directly involved, since interchange of altars would be extensively urged and practised. Sooner or later, every parish in the country would be directly involved.

12—IMPORTANT OMISSIONS

Apart from the defects discussed above, some of them of a very grave character, the Report omits certain matters of serious importance.

(a) It deliberately omits, after brief notice, to discuss the difficulty caused by the recognition of women ministers by some bodies. A "general plan of agreement" is impossible without the settlement of this problem.

(b) Attempts at co-operation with Free Churchmen often bring to light grave divergences of doctrine. E.g. discussion of the drink question reveals a cleavage on the subject of Creation. These matters did not, it is true, come properly within the scope of the Report, but they are germane to the subject of reunion.

(c) There is no discussion of the meaning of priesthood.

(d) In particular, the power of absolution is not even mentioned.

Above all, as has already been indicated,

(e) There is no hint as to *why* the Free Churches should accept episcopacy except as a condition regarded as indispensable by Anglicans.

THE TASKS CONFRONTING US

This chimera of immediate reunion with the Free Churches is dividing and distracting the Church of England. If only we can get it out of the way, both we and the Free Churchmen will be able to settle down and devote our energies to the immense tasks confronting us.

In the first place, there are about thirty million people in the country who do not own any religious allegiance nor take part in the worship of God. Here is a task sufficient to occupy the full energies of the Church of England and the Free Churches. And we can work at it, not in competition but side by side, though not necessarily in close conjunction, for the comparison between the disappointment of the Commando Campaign and the success of the Mission to London has lessons to teach.

In the second place, both the Free Churches and ourselves have much work to do before reunion can be envisaged as an immediate possibility. It is unwise to assume that the breaches of hundreds of years can be repaired in a decade or so. There is already a great change of attitude, thank God, but much remains to be accomplished in this field. We Anglicans have much to learn about, and probably a great deal to learn from, our Free Church brethren. We believe that they have also a great deal to learn from us. We already read each other's books, and we can meet together in study circles and conferences. We must take every opportunity of expressing charity and furthering friendliness. Every time an opportunity of co-operation occurs, it should be carefully examined, and if it seems really profitable, it should be whole-heartedly pursued. All this ought to be going on throughout the length and breadth of this land, not only with our Free Church brethren but also, when opportunity allows, with Roman Catholics and Orthodox.

Thirdly, there is a great deal of work to be done within the Church of England. It may be said that before we can profitably pursue reunion with anyone else, we Anglicans must achieve reunion with each other. We must, as the Archbishop says, "analyse exactly what are the underlying principles involved" (p. 19) and try to reach a common mind upon "the essential principles of the Church, the Scriptures, the Creeds and of the Ministry itself." Only when this work has been accomplished will the Church of England be ready for reunion with others. In the meantime we are in a strategic position in Christendom, and we must have a serious sense of responsibility in the tasks which lie before us.

Fourthly, and this is by far the most important thing of all, we must *pray*. If, across the barriers which separate, we can, without necessarily meeting, pray and offer ourselves for the fulfilment of God's will, then in God's good time and in God's own way, the end we earnestly desire will be reached.

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